

The basic questions of inflection classes, with hints towards answers to some

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1. What are INFLECTION CLASSES?

Or, for nominalists: **What do we call INFLECTION CLASSES?**
(called DECLENSIONS in nominal and CONJUGATIONS in verbal inflection)

We assume inflection classes iff different words of the same word-class which inflect for the same inflectional category or category-bundle (realized by the same terms or term-bundles) require (i) morphologically distinct exponents for identical terms or term-bundles or (ii) morphologically distinct formatives accompanying these exponents (known as themes, stem extensions. etc.), regardless of the exponents themselves being identical or distinct; otherwise inflection for the word-class concerned is uniform.

An inflection class then is the set (i) of exponents for the terms or term-bundles of the respective inflectional category or category-bundle, or (ii) of the formatives accompanying them, of words taking the same set.

Since it's strictly speaking two different things, let's accordingly distinguish (i) EXPONENTIAL and (ii) THEMATIC inflection classes.

Though different, they could be diachronically related, with exponential inflection classes developing from thematic ones, through phonological and/or morphological integration.

Purposeless Variety

Other than, for example, noun classification by gender or verb classification in terms of transitivity/valence, inflection-class membership is of no grammatical relevance whatsoever BEYOND ITSELF; in particular, it does not make itself felt word-externally (for purposes such as agreement or government).

Perhaps it can be of some relevance word-internally, co-determining other classifications of the same words (e.g. gender). Or are such other classifications (co- or partly) determined by inflection-class membership?

Relevance “unto itself”:

Logically, ANY SINGLE TERM OR TERM-BUNDLE in the inflection of words of the same word-class for a given category or category-bundle can have morphologically invariant or variant exponence.

For assuming inflection classes as holistically defined above, it suffices if only one term or term-bundle in a possibly large set has variant exponence; all others could be invariant across relevant words. Such inflection classes would be MINIMALLY DISTINCT. When inflection classes are MORE-THAN-MINIMALLY DISTINCT, with variant exponents for several or maximally all terms or term-bundles of the set, the question arises (for linguists and learners) whether the choice of a variant exponent for one term or term-bundle is independent of or interdependent with the choice of variant exponents for other terms or term-bundles in the set.

Inflection classes are relevant unto themselves to the extent that there are such INTERDEPENDENCIES.

2. Excursus: When is variance MORPHOLOGICAL?

Inflection classes come about through MORPHOLOGICAL VARIANCE in inflection.

TAXONOMY OF VARIANCE/INVARIANCE

(underlining indicates variance often considered prototypical for inflection classes; for illustration see transparencies)

- (a) Alternation itself:
 - (i) phonological
 - (ii) non-phonological
- (b) Conditioning of Alternation:
 - (i) phonological
 - (ii) morphological
 - (iii) syntactic (e.g. word-class or subclass)
 - (iv) semantic(-pragmatic)
 - (v) lexical
 - (vi) mixed

Now, with two kinds of alternations and six kinds of conditionings, there are twelve possible kinds of variance (and with the possible exception of non-phonologically conditioned phonological alternations all are attested). Do they form natural classes? In particular, which are morphological?

Two answers have been given:

- Only the nature of alternations themselves matters (for such purposes as being subject to phonological or morphological locality conditions and for interactions with other phonological and morphological rules), irrespective of the conditioning.
- The kind of conditioning matters, too.

In particular, LEXICALLY conditioned (non-phonological) variance (with inflection-class membership thus part of the “meaning” of lexemes, unrelated to any of their other lexical or assigned properties) is special; it tends to correlate with all sorts of other things, including cumulative (rather than separative) exponence and the other parameters implicated in the FLEXIVE vs. AGGLUTINATIVE typology.

3. How are inflection classes manifesting themselves? In particular:

How many are there or can there be (for the word-class concerned)?

- no more than there are variants for the most highly variant term or term-bundle (Paradigm Economy, or No Blur [transparency], according to Carstairs-McCarthy)

How many variants can there be for a term or term-bundle? 2? 10? 100? 1000?

- however many inflectional exponents happen to have been grammaticalized.

How different can they be from each other?

- wholly or partly?
 - if partly: How are variance and invariance distributed?
 - according to markedness?
- (thus: invariance with marked terms and in marked contexts)

illustration from CASE.NUMBER inflection, see transparencies

Is the choice among the variant exponents of a term or term-bundle independent of or dependent on the choice for other variant terms or term-bundles?

- if dependent: What depends on what? What are the characteristic forms or *Kennformen*? (implicantia in *Paradigmenstrukturbedingungen*, Wurzel)
 - naturally, those which happen to be most variant (because least marked?)

4. Where are inflection classes manifesting themselves?

- nowhere?
- everywhere?
- somewhere, arbitrarily distributed across the languages of the world?
- somewhere, genealogically distributed?
(i.e., diachronically stable, because easy to acquire)
- somewhere, areally distributed?
(i.e., tending towards diffusion, because easy to borrow)
- somewhere, distributed functionally, culturally, ...?
(in complex rather than simple cultures? in small and isolated rather than in large, well-connected speech communities? in written rather than spoken languages? ...)
- somewhere, typologically distributed? If so, dependent on what?
 - morphological type: flexion rather than agglutination, in particular cumulative rather than separative exponence?
 - a coexisting of a second (younger and semantically more transparent) classification for the same word-class, itself of word-external relevance?

When there are inflection classes in a particular language, are some word-classes likelier than others to indulge in such variance?

- V > N > A > Adv? (according to a general inflectional preference)

5. How are inflection classes developing?

What do they develop from, and how?

- through univerbation of variant free forms, remaining variant
- through phonological diversification of invariant (bound) forms and their subsequent reanalysis as lexically conditioned non-phonological variants
- through morphological reanalysis of another morphological distinction (perhaps derivational rather than inflectional), including the loss of semantic transparency and of external relevance of an earlier classification, superseded by a new classification but hanging on for a while as only relevant unto itself

How do they change?

(changes of classes as such, or of class membership, with the big ones getting ever bigger)

How do they disappear?

- through phonological uniformation of variants, and/or their reanalysis as non-lexically conditioned phonological variants
- through discontinuation of inflectional variants (analogical extension), or of inflection altogether

6. Why inflection classes?

Is it conceivable that something as uneconomical (variance) and dysfunctional (“only relevant unto itself”) as inflection classes has, in some sense, been really intended by speakers or speech communities or the “Sprachgeist”? Or can they only be made sense of as the (regrettable, but inevitable) byproduct of something other really intended?

- diachronic transformation of something once economical and/or useful
- functional usefulness for learners: NO SYNONYMY!/NO BLUR! (Carstairs-McCarthy); though essentially also diachronic: given morphological variants (wherever they come from), distribute them judiciously over subsets of words inflecting for the same categories, so as to avoid synonymy!
[Why don't inflection classes occur everywhere, then, but seem to be distributed typologically, correlating with flexion rather than agglutination? Because there is more variance with flexion, waiting to be made sense of?]

Die Entstehung von Deklinationsklassen nach Wurzel

Ich möchte bei dieser Gelegenheit an eine weniger beachtete, aber wichtige Arbeit von Wolfgang Ullrich Wurzel erinnern, nämlich “Die wiederholte Klassifikation von Substantiven: Zur Entstehung von Deklinationsklassen”, erschienen in der *Zeitschrift für Phonetik, Sprachwissenschaft und Kommunikationsforschung* 39 (1986) 76-96.

Wurzels Grundthese in diesem Aufsatz ist, dass Deklinationsklassen morphologische Klassen sind, die sich der Degenerierung semantischer Klassen verdanken. Diese “Degenerierung”, ein mit Alterung von Morphologie (nach Wurzel) nur zu erwartender “Ver schleiss”, soll (a) in einer Entsemantisierung der Klassifikation und (b) im Verlust ihrer syntaktischen Relevanz für Kongruenzzwecke bestehen. Diese beiden logisch voneinander unabhängigen Entwicklungsstränge sollen durch den kompensatorischen Aufbau einer neuen, semantisch motivierten Nominal-Klassifikation verknüpft sein.

Verbunden mit einer Darstellung dieser Theorie Wurzels möchte ich aus typologischer und diachronischer Sicht einige Fragen zu Flexionsklassen aufwerfen, die sie unbeantwortet lässt. (Nicht, dass sie alle sonstwo überzeugende Antworten gefunden hätten: ganz im Gegenteil.)

Das Wurzel-Szenario der Entstehung von Deklinationsklassen

Phase I. Aufbau eines Systems der Nominalklassifikation, in Sprachen, deren Nomina eher Klassenbegriffe bezeichnen (referenz- und numerus-neutral sind, eher Kollektiva als Individuativa); Funktion also sowohl individuierend als auch generalisierend

Wie? durch “Grammatisierung”

- (a) Wortart-Reanalyse:
Nomina von allgemeiner Bedeutung / Pronomina > Klassifikatoren
- (b) grammatische Verfestigung:
 - (i) **Klassen semantisch transparent > opak**
(wegen angeblich größter Instabilität semantisch motivierter Klassifizierung [Hauptgrund: Bedeutungswandel von Nomina “offenbar unaufhaltsam” — aber immer wieder ergibt sich doch das “Bedürfnis” nach einer neuen, konsequent semantisch motivierten Klassifikation])
 - (ii) Klassifikatoren fakultativ > obligatorisch in allen Kontexten von NPs
 - (iii) Klassifikation bei Untermengen von Nomina (belebt) > bei allen
 - (iv) Klassifikation variabel > lexikalisch fixiert
 - (v) viele Klassen > weniger

Phase II. Morphologisierung der Klassifikation:

Klassifikator_{WORT} > Klassifikator_{AFFIX}
Klassifikator_{SPARAT} > Klassifikator_{KUMULIERT (z.B. mit Numerus)}

Klassenzugehörigkeit kann (Swahili), muss aber nicht (Vietnamesisch) für Kongruenz (NP-intern, NP-extern) genutzt werden;
abhängig von morphologischer Gebundenheit?

*Phase X. Entstehung von Kongruenz
wie? woraus? wozu?*

(Ursprung der Klassifikation nicht in der Kongruenz selbst liegend gesehen; Klassifikation als am klassifizierten Nomen selbst markiert gesehen)

- Phase III. Aufbau eines neuen Systems der Nominalklassifikation, speziell für Zwecke der Kongruenz
- keine Kongruenz / Kongruenz nach (vielen) semantisch opaken Klassen
> Kongruenz nach (wenigen) semantisch transparenteren Klassen,
zumindest für Nomina hoch auf der Belebtheitsskala,
unter Nutzung der betreffenden Untermenge vorhandener Klassifikatoren,
aber gegebenenfalls unter Ausserkraftsetzung der alten Kongruenz

also: an Kongruenz-*Trägern* markierte neue Klassifikation semantisch transparent, unter Fortbestehen einer an Kongruenz-*Kontrolleuren* selbst markierten semantisch opaken alten Klassifikation (=Deklinationsklassen)

- Phase IV. Ausbau der 2. Klassifikation,
weitere Desemantisierung der 1. Klassifikation
- einige Nomina (Lebewesen) > alle unterliegen der 2. Klassifikation
- Varianz bei der 1. Klassifikation rudimentär semantisch > phonologisch bedingt (unter Fusion von separaten gebundenen Klassifikatoren und Flexionsexponenten), unter Wechsel von Klassenzugehörigkeiten
- Unterordnung der 1. Klassifikation (Deklinationen) unter die 2. (Genus), durch entsprechende (Um-)Verteilung der Deklinationsklassenzugehörigkeiten relativ zur Genuszugehörigkeit (eine Deklinationsklasse enthält nicht Mitglieder aller Genera — aber auch umgekehrte Beschränkungen; vgl. Corbett)

- Phase V. Desemantisierung der 2. Klassifikation,
Aufbau einer semantisch ursprünglich wieder transparenten 3. Klassifikation, von oben her auf der Belebtheitsskala,
für Zwecke der NP-externen Kongruenz,
unter weiterer Nutzung der 2. Klassifikation für NP-interne Kongruenz

- Phase VI. Desemantisierung der 3. Klassifikation

- usw. aber mehr als eine neueste 3. Klassifikation, eine mittelalte 2. Klassifikation und Spuren einer uralten 1. Klassifikation (=Deklinationsklassen) werden nicht gleichzeitig in einer Sprache zu finden sein
(mangels weitergehender Differenzierung von Kongruenz-Domänen?
und/oder infolge formaler Erosion der uralten bzw. auch der mittelalten Klassifikation?)